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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: IRAQ

1. Sri Lanka's English front pages found room for only two war-related headlines: "US-led forces destroy Iraqi column" and "US-led troops poised to enter Baghdad as week two begins." The vernacular dailies, by contrast, splashed the war across all front pages with headlines such as "Iraq 'Republican' military force equipped with 1,000 tanks is moving south ... to counter attack coalition forces coming to invade Baghdad," "1,000 US paratroopers occupy Iraqi air force camp ... largest operation in ten years," and "Saddam's special task force to protect Baghdad" (Sinhala dailies); and "Special forces under Saddam's son move to protect Baghdad," "30,000 more US forces rush to the Gulf," and "New war front in Northern Iraq" as "1,000 U.S. soldiers land by parachute."

2. Under the headline "What's the role of the UN?" the ISLAND (opposition English daily, islandwide circulation) discusses a "basic question that is being asked amongst western powers ...: who rules Iraq if the Saddam Hussein regime is eliminated?. The ISLAND hopes -- but doubts -- that the "UN has to step in at some stage. The sooner, the better." Excerpts:

"With the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of one superpower, the prospects of the UN playing a more significant role in world affairs was much greater. Indeed President George Bush (Sr.) played according to UN rules when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait by putting together a coalition of nations in accordance with UN resolutions and driving the invader out of Kuwait. But the son has acted like a bull in a china shop. Whereas even radical, usually anti-American Arab states, joined the father's coalition ... Saddam, who has been hated in many Arab countries, is being cheered and volunteers queuing up to fight for him.

"The war in the past few days has amply demonstrated American power to win it but President Bush has failed to convince the world that it is a just war even though he is attempting to rid Iraq of a bloody dreaded dictator.

"The UN has to step in at some stage. The sooner, the better."

3. Under "Tears and sorrow as a result of war" VIRAKESARI (independent Tamil daily, islandwide circulation) laments the impact of the war, here in Sri Lanka and there in Iraq. Excerpts:

"While the U.S. war on Iraq has brought hardship to Iraqis, effects of war are being experienced in Sri Lanka now.

"While a sad situation is being created for the hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankan workers in the Middle East to return to Sri Lanka owing to losing their jobs, the prices of the essential items will go up in price because of the price hike of the petroleum products.

"With the fall of job opportunities in Middle East, which brings most of the foreign exchange, Sri Lanka will be further affected the fall in tea exports. 70 percent of the tea recently offered in auction remained unsold. This is a big blow to our economy....

"After killing ... attacking with the latest weapons and ... and destroying buildings, villages, and cities, President Bush says with a smile that freedom for Iraqis is dawning.... Bush, building castles upon the lives of innocent Iraqi people and against the opposition of the people world all over, has requested the Congress to allocate \$75 billion for the war.

"Another sorrowful chapter in the history of the sufferings of the century is being written today."

Wills